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ABSTRACT

The concept of management by consent is examined in an assessment of management techniques within academe. Issues that are analyzed include what is involved in an organization of consent and factors heralding the organizations of consent, such as (1) the view of management as a semi-profession, and (2) the spread of "matrism," which is optimistic about the future, decries the past, wants discussion rather than orders, places reliance on expertise rather than experience, etc. Principles adopted in managing by consent include: recognize the right to disagree, control by planning not by checking, manage by reciprocal trust, manage by platoons, be yourself, and conserve your energy. Implications for society seem ominous, since several undersireable consequences are likely, including managerial burnout, professional obsolescence, and the development of the "globule" society, made up of small groups that constantly change their shape and that are divided into interest groups. (LBH)

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THE ORGANISATIONS OF CONSENT

"Universities," I said, "are the prototypes of the organisations of tomorrow." "If that be so," said a Professor standing near, "then God help us all!"

Behind my remark, however, was the suggestion that universities, rather like voluntary societies, theatrical groups or mountain climbing teams, have to be managed to be effective, but have to be managed by consent. There seem to be good grounds for supposing that this is the way of the future for all organisations, that the organisation managed by consent will be as common and as necessary in the City or the factory as it is in the theatre. If this be so, then we had best begin to learn how to manage such organisations rather better than we do today.

What do we mean by the organisation of consent? Why do they seem to be on the increase? Perhaps we should explore these questions before looking at the management practices required and the implications of such organisations for society as a whole.

What is involved in an Organisation of Consent?

The psychological contract between individual and organisation has a different slant in an organisation of consent. The psychological contract is implicit. In the average run of organisations the contract would run something like this:

"The individual is there because he has a particular talent or skill or aptitude or just a pair of hands, he is lending this resource to the organisation in return for some mixture of money, facilities, excitement, or just the chance to participate in something in which he believes." If the organisation violates this implicit contract, if, for instance, if offers increased excitement when all the individual wants is money, then it runs into difficulties.

In the organisation of consent the contract goes beyond this. For one thing, it has a very individual slant. The individual tends to see himself as a valuable resource which the organisation ought to cherish. Secondly, he is very much an individual with a personality and with individual rights and must be so regarded. Thirdly, the contract includes some deep beliefs about the way people should relate to each other. Hierarchy is bad. Argument is good. All men, and women, are essentially equal.

The flavour of the organisation of consent can best be conveyed by some short anecdotes.

- I was talking with some friends who belong to such an organisation and happened to remark how interesting it was that one person could make such a difference to one's life and work if that one person was one's boss.

  "How odd," they said, "that you think of yourself as having a boss."

- In attempting to manage one bit of an organisation of consent I was trying to discuss why my instructions had not been carried out by a colleague that I thought of as subordinate to me. "You cannot tell me to do something," he explained gently, "you can only ask me." "On the other hand," he went on, rubbing salt into the wound, "I don't ask you if I'm going to do something, I tell you."

- A friend, moving into an organisation of consent from a traditional hierarchical business organisation, was dismayed to find that his circular memoranda and his published requirements of his associates produced absolutely no result at all, not even rebellion, just silence.

  "Would you believe it?" he said, "I've had to go along and make an individual personal contract with each one of them."

To the outsider these anecdotes would seem unbelievable, the attitudes described intolerable. How can

organisations work, he would say, without rules and procedures? There must be some decision-making procedure, some delegation of responsibility, some way in which A has the right to require B to do so and so. And of course he would be correct. No organisation can survive for long without the apportionment of responsibility and the concomitant authority.

The friend who ran afoul of the organisation of consent got into further difficulties when he assumed that since his associates rejected his assumption of decision-making powers they wanted to take all decisions themselves. Not so. "That's your job," they said, "we have other and better things to do than to help you take your decisions." He had confused the questioning of his authority with the questioning of authority as a principle.

For the distinction between the organisation of consent and the traditional hierarchical organisation is that authority in the former is granted by those below whereas in the hierarchical state authority is conferred by those above. Your official role in the organisation of consent gives you little effective power - that is only won by the consent of those you seek to manage. Nor does this consent, once given, hold good for all time or for all circumstances. It needs constant ratification.

This process of the ratification of authority does not mean that everyone must be involved in everything. The organisation of consent is not a consensus organisation. Far from it. The manager in an organisation of consent is meant to manage, to take decisions, set up information systems, plan and organise. Each individual, it is felt, has his own proper and valuable role to play and no-one wants to do anyone else's work for him. But the important decisions, the right to institute procedures, must be exposed to possible dissent before implementation. The individual may not want to be involved but he does want to be consulted. He wants to be unfettered but not unnoticed. The minority report may never be implemented but it has a right to be heard.

Ratification of authority proceeds therefore by exposure to dissent. It is consultative management, not participative management. Committees and meetings in these organisations will be large but they will not be decision-making forums. They will be rather the testing-grounds of decisions, the platforms for dissenters.

It is when the management confuses the need to be consulted with the need to participate, or feels that a minority's desire to be heard means a wish to veto, that the organisation of consent becomes a bog of talk and inertia.

It is when a management, un-understanding, infringes the psychological contract by assuming unratified authority that morale is lowered, secrecy and subversion mounts, energy and commitment reduce. Lonely and anxious, management then too often responds with more controls and checks, more assumed rights. Self-fulfilling, the organisation begins to respond only to whips and spurs and everyone wonders what went wrong.

Factors heralding the organisations of consent

These are the most difficult of organisations to manage. Why, one may well ask, should one tolerate them or encourage their existence? Unfortunately, the choice is not ours. There is a range of trends in our society which makes it likely that all organisations will one day have to be managed by consent, whether we will it or not. How one might go about this management task will be discussed in the next section. First, let us briefly look at two major forces at work on organisations.

Management as a semi-profession

The principle advantage of a profession to its practitioners, namely protected entry and its corollaries of catchment areas, agreed fee scales and effective tenure, is never likely to become available to managers. Instead, as it gradually assumes

the societal status of a profession management and the manager may be acquiring only the difficult cut of the deal.

Leaving aside the union-like aspects of professionalism the other concomitants of a professional status for one's work are:-

a) Work becomes a major source of identity. If you cease to describe yourself in terms of where you live or of your ancestry, but describe yourself in terms of your occupation, then the nature and style of that occupation become increasingly important to you. Work is no longer instrumental, it is central to your identity. You therefore look for opportunities to express and develop your identity at work instead of outside your work

b) Skill-related earnings. A professional, like a craftsman, is paid for his skill. If the skill deteriorates or is no longer required, then the earnings diminish or cease. Redundant blacksmiths received no income from their previous users when these switched from horses to cars. Professional managers, like mercenaries, will be well paid when their skills are needed but cannot expect employment for old times sake. The idea of an organisation owing a man a career is disappearing with the growth of professionalism. The professional manager will therefore be concerned to ply his skill to his maximum advantage. His commitment will be to himself first, his profession next, his organisation third.

c) Mobility and self-development. Professionals are mobile. Their reference group spreads across organisations. If organisations are less committed to them so are they to organisations. If they are good they can move when they want to. Since their career will not necessarily be with the same organisation they cannot expect the organisation to invest too much in their long-term development. They must take responsibility for their own development. Mobility is one good way of doing this.

> Organisations will find that their good men have to be handled gently or they will disappear. Effectively the good professionals have tenure. It is only the poor and the mediocre who can be ordered around.

Organisations used to view themselves as twentieth-century squirearchies, with managers and workers as their agents and tenants. The emergence of the manager as a professional has meant the abandonment of this conception of the organisation. An organisation, at the managerial level, is becoming more and more a partnership of mobile professionals. Such organisations can only be managed by consent.

The spread of matrism

Gordon Rattray Taylor in his latest book "Rethink" has drawn attention to the difference between what he terms patrism and matrism in our society. The values and attitudes of patrism might be called traditional, or tough, as opposed to radical or tender. Patrism believes in order and discipline, wishes to maintain the traditions of the past and respect for authority, values self-control and rational behaviour, distinguishes male and female roles, puts more faith in experience than insight, age than youth. Matrism on the other hand is optimistic about the future, decries the past, believes in openness and likes emotions, makes little distinction between the sexes, wants discussion rather than orders, places reliance on expertise rather than experience, values youth and imagination more than age.

We can debate whether Rattray Taylor is right in attributing the swing towards matrism to changes in child-rearing practices. But the dimension he is describing seems real enough and there are indisputable signs that the younger generation have more matrist values. If this is so, then organisations will not be able to buck the trend. Management style is neither ultimately right nor ultimately wrong, it is only culturally appropriate. The hierarchical style of management may well have been appropriate to a Britain reared by Victorians and Georgians. For the

new Elizabethans it seems very probable that the culturally appropriate style is going to be management by consent.

How Does One Manage by Consent?

There are certain principles that seem to apply. Like all principles they are easier to describe than to practice. Perhaps at least they will provide a manager in an organisation of consent with a check-list of desiderata.

1. Recognise the Right to Disagree.
   In these organisations John Stuart Mill's dictum that truth proceeds from argument is a widely held belief. To be invited to disagree is everyone's prerogative but this does not imply that they have the right to take the decision, that right belongs to him to whom they have consigned the responsibility.

2. Control by Planning not by Checking.
   In these organisations it is legitimate to plan and to replan or change plans. It is not legitimate to check what others are doing unless their specific agreement has been obtained. Information for planning is willingly vouchsafed, information for monitoring less willingly. The manager therefore has to work with a variety of planning cycles and be clearly seen to use past information as a base for future planning.

3. Manage by Reciprocal Trust.
   Trust and control displace each other. If you are seen to control someone you are seen not to trust them. If you cannot control them you must trust them. Similarly they must trust you. Reciprocal trust is hard to establish and is not self-maintaining. It is easier to trust those whom you yourself have chosen than those you are landed with. Tenure, at least for managerial positions, must be on its way out since it reduces a top manager's freedom to choose his own colleagues.

4. Manage by Platoons.
   Individuals find it easier to identify with smaller groups. They also perceive themselves to have

greater influence the smaller their primary group. Trust is easier to create, the smaller the group. The concept of platoons, the ten-group in Antony Jay's analogy, has served the army well and must be one of the buttresses in an organisation of consent.

The platoon concept should be allowed to override other ways of organising work which may look more rational but involve larger primary groups. Individuals may be individuals but they need a group to identify with. Everyone should therefore be a member of at least one platoon.

5. Be Yourself.
Organisations of consent are personal rather than impersonal. You cannot trust a facade. Openness and frankness and sincerity are valued. To act a role is to disappear as a person. Whatever your idiosyncracies or habits or values, let them be visible. Your sense of your identity and purpose gives identity and purpose to your part of the organisation. These organisations are tolerant of unimportant differences, but place great emphasis on the concept of "mission" or "purpose".

6. Husband Your Energy.
The managerial role in these organisations is exhausting. To treat individuals as individuals, to welcome disagreement, to tolerate dissent, to listen more than talk, to be true to oneself as well as others - all these requirements require a deal of energy. When energy fails we fall back on routines and general principles, we listen less and dictate more. Fatigue should not be a battle honour in these organisations, it should be a crime. Protect what Toffler calls "Stability Zones", the places of retreat, the times of withdrawal, and you will protect your colleagues.

The Implications for Society

Organisations built on consent sound exciting, sound democratic and in tune with modern ideals. In fact they look to be dragging a train of undesired consequences behind them:

1. Managerial Burn-Out.
   The energy requirements of managers in these organisations is so high that in years to come it will be the exception when a man of over 50 will be appointed to a top managerial job.

   In all probability skill-related earnings will increasingly contain a high proportion of provision for the future - in the form of pensions, stock-options, etc. It will no longer be necessary to work till 65 to provide for life-time earnings. But financial viability does not guarantee psychological satisfaction. Society will find itself with a glut of economically self-sufficient unemployed managers in their fifties. Seen as a resource for other sectors of society this vision is optimistic. There is however a real danger that they become a resource for the psycho-analyst.

2. Professional Obsolescence.
   In a profession with no control over entry the good will prosper and the bad perish. Change, we are constantly reminded, is changing ever faster. To survive in the new self-responsible world the individual will have to maintain a constant investment in his own development. A heady prospect for adult education perhaps, but there will be many who will forget to provide for the future in the trauma of the present. Will society provide a safety net?

3. The Globule Society.
   If the middle-classes become increasingly professional and self-oriented, if mobility increases, if the successful prosper and the failures perish, one can see a society made up of small globules which constantly change their shape. Homes, families and friendship groups will be temporary and changing. Loyalty will become an outmoded virtue. Society

will be divided into interest groups, force increasingly used as a mediator, stress the modern epidemic.

It is not a pleasant picture. If one takes a look into the future, a fashionable and low-risk pastime, an ironic possibility emerges. The organisation of consent will prove too demanding and too threatening to most of society. We shall see the emergence, as a form of self-protection, of Modular Man, the individual who gets only part of his identity from his work. The job will become instrumental once again, individuals will become less committed to the organisation but will expect less of it. Economic growth will slow down, but non-economic activities will flourish. Mobility will decrease as individuals develop other ties than their work. Society will be more stable, less rich, perhaps more fun.

Perhaps, after all, the Organisation of Consent will be only a temporary phenomenon. But of this I am sure, it will dominate us for a time, and we in the management of universities are already tasting its pleasures and its pains.